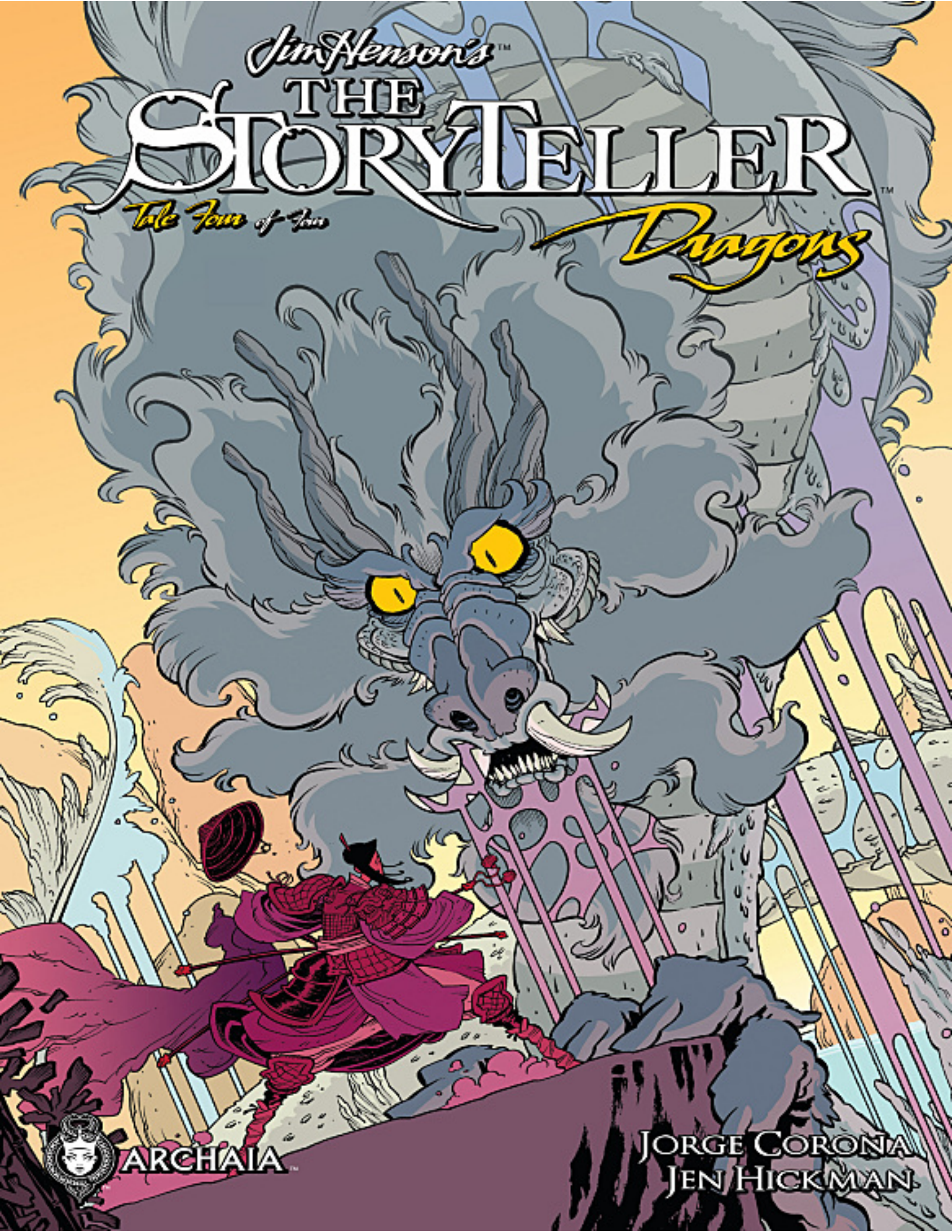
Jim Henson's
THE STORYTELLER
Tale Four of Four
Dragons
ARCHAIA
JORGE CORONA
JEN HICKMAN

Samurai's Sacrifice

Story & Art by
Jorge Corona

Colors by
Jen Hickman

Letters by
Warren Montgomery

Cover by Jorge Corona

Spot Illustrations by David Petersen

Designer
Jillian Crab

Assistant Editor
Cameron Chittock

Editor
Sierra Hahn

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Jim Henson's™
THE STORYTELLER™
Dragons

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SO...HOW ABOUT ANOTHER STORY, OLD BOY?
YAWN ANOTHER ONE?
THERE'S ALWAYS TIME FOR ANOTHER STORY. DON'T YOU THINK?
IF YOU SAY SO.

Silly old dog! What is life if not the adventure of one story after the other? Take this one, for example.
Once, a long time ago, off the shore of a very prosperous land, there was an accursed place known as the *Oki Islands*.

A nasty place, really. Filled with monsters and demons. Oh, yes! Poor were the souls that lived in such a terrible land.
There, one wrong turn could mean death...or worse.

GRRR!!!

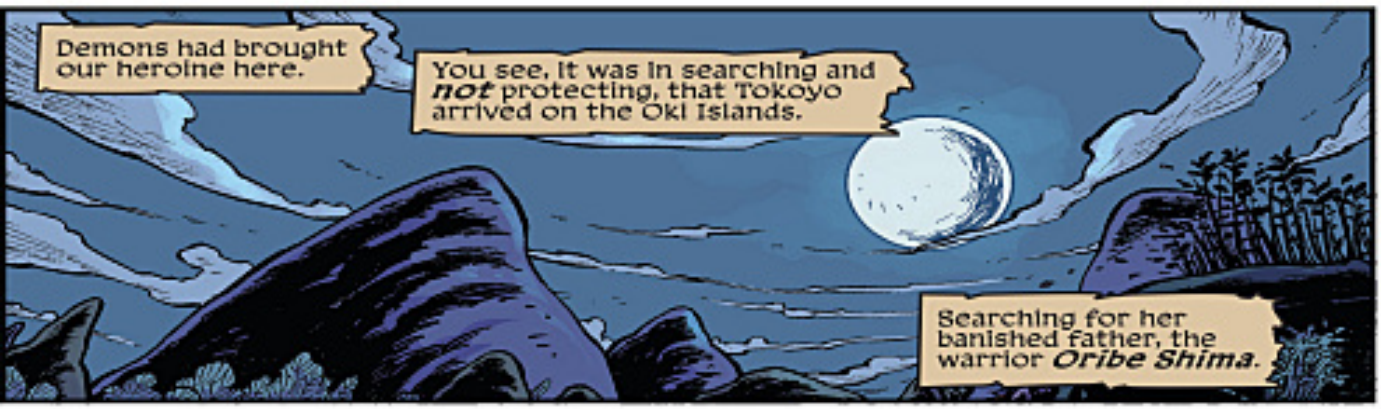
¡GASP!

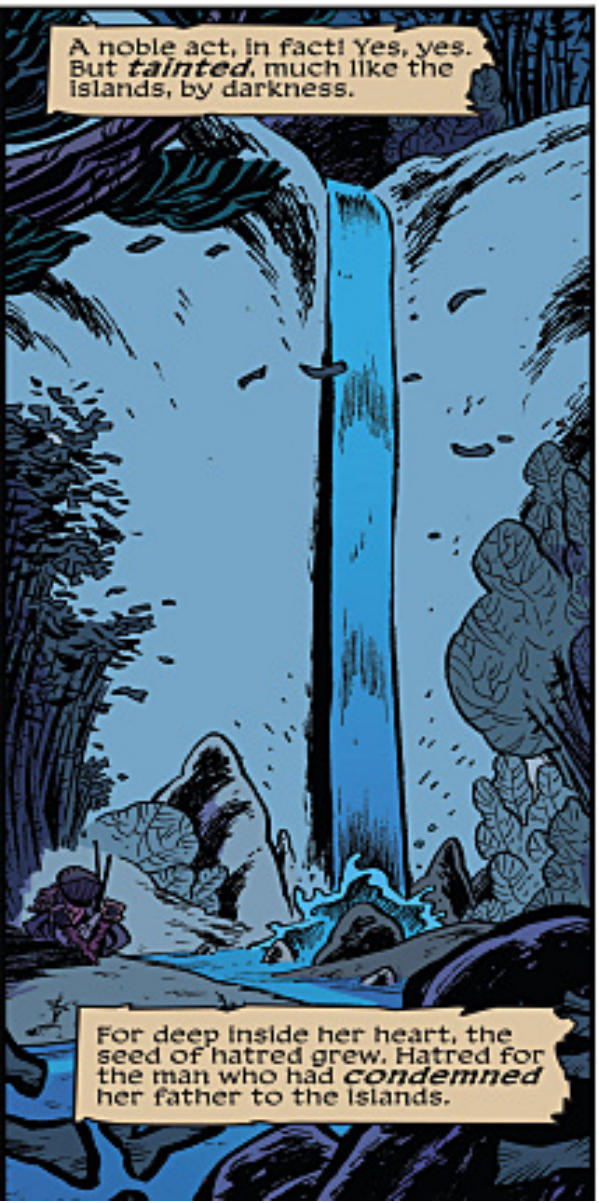
AIIIEEE!!!

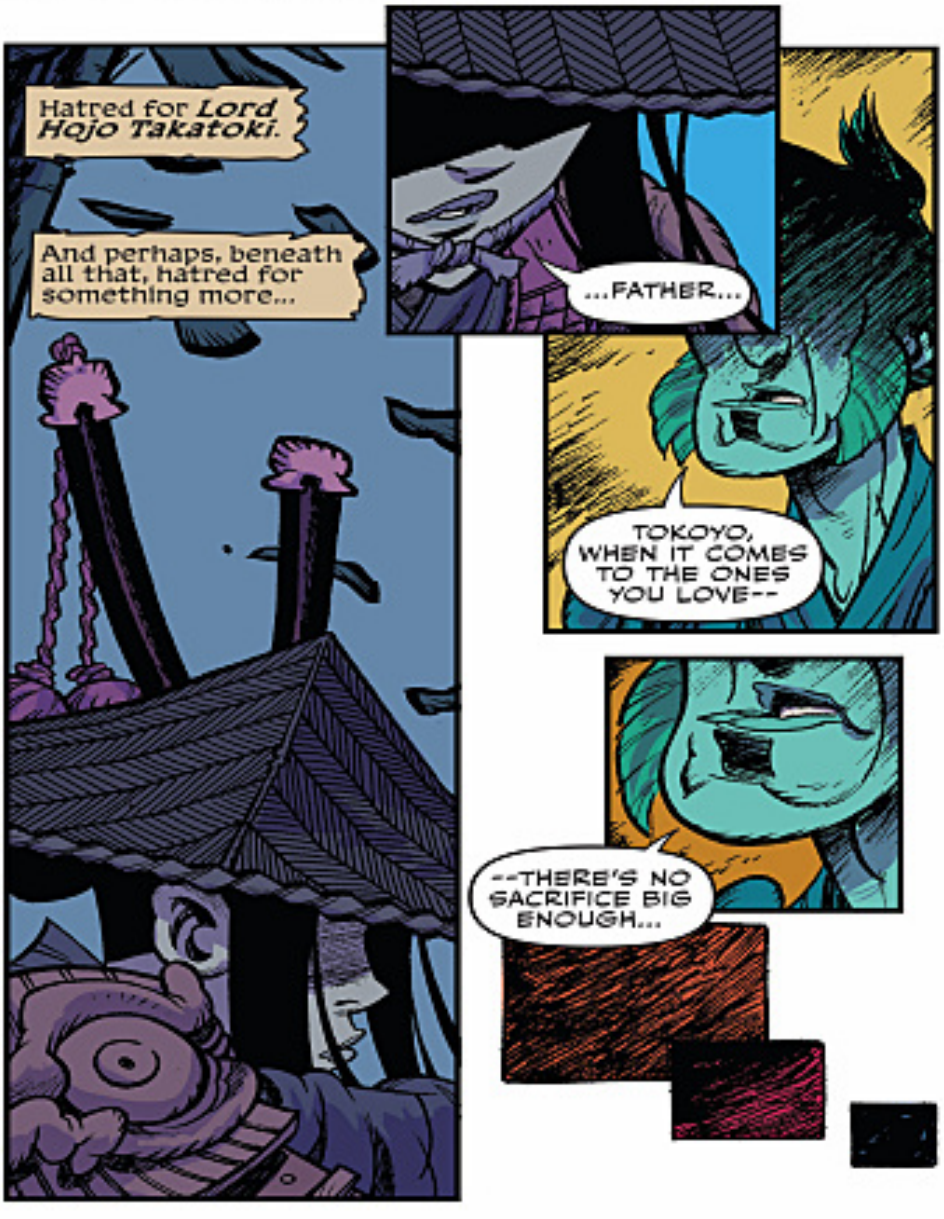
There was no hope left in the hearts of its inhabitants.
SH!KKK
SHURK
SHUNK

Until one day a rumor spread.
GRRR?
The rumor of a young warrior, a heroine named Tokoyo, who had come to save their land from the creatures that lurked among them.
WHUSHH
Besides her skill with the sword, little was known about the mysterious girl.
She was recognized only by her armor, worn by the army of the neighboring mainland.
In gratitude, the locals would thank not the girl but her master, Lord Hojo Takatoki, for sending help to their impoverished island.
And, boy, was that the wrong thing to do! For just the mention of the Lord's name boiled the blood of our young warrior.
YOU CAN THANK HOJO FOR THAT.
RIIP

SOME HEROINE SHE TURNED OUT TO BE.
AH, BUT YOU SEE, A HERO, A *TRUE* HERO, IS NOT ONE THAT BATTLES JUST THE DEMONS AHEAD...
BUT, ALSO, THOSE THAT LIVE *WITHIN*.

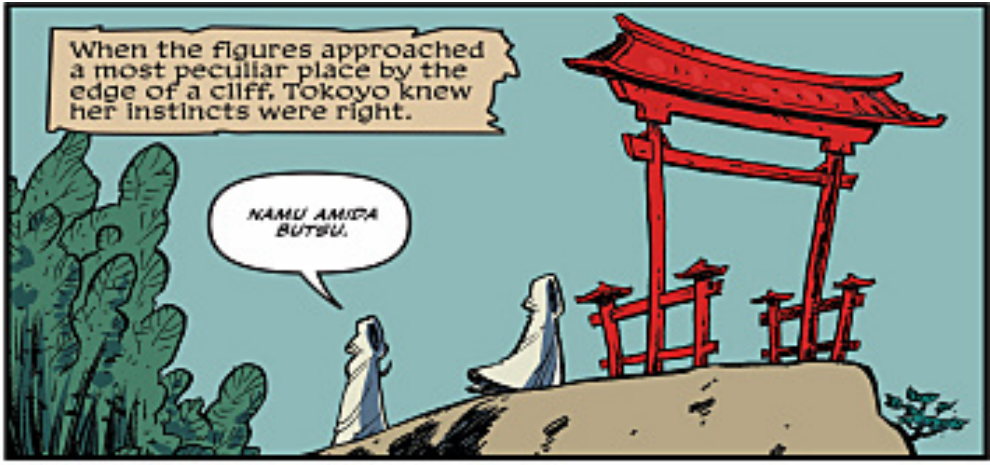

Demons had brought our heroine here.
You see, it was in searching and *not* protecting, that Tokoyo arrived on the Oki Islands.
Searching for her banished father, the warrior *Oribe Shima*.


A noble act, in fact! Yes, yes. But *tainted*, much like the islands, by darkness.
For deep inside her heart, the seed of hatred grew. Hatred for the man who had *condemned* her father to the Islands.


Hatred for *Lord Hojo Takatoki*.
And perhaps, beneath all that, hatred for something more...
...FATHER...
TOKOYO, WHEN IT COMES TO THE ONES YOU LOVE--
--THERE'S NO SACRIFICE BIG ENOUGH...

CLAP!
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU!
CLAP!
A terrible thing, hate.
It takes root deep within your heart, expanding, like branches from a tree, until it turns you into something you barely recognize.
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.
For this reason, and this alone, Tokoyo wore her armor.
CLAP!
Not to honor her former master, Lord Hojo, but to remind herself of the warrior she used to be.
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.
Of the oath she made. To be a blade for those who could not wield one for themselves.

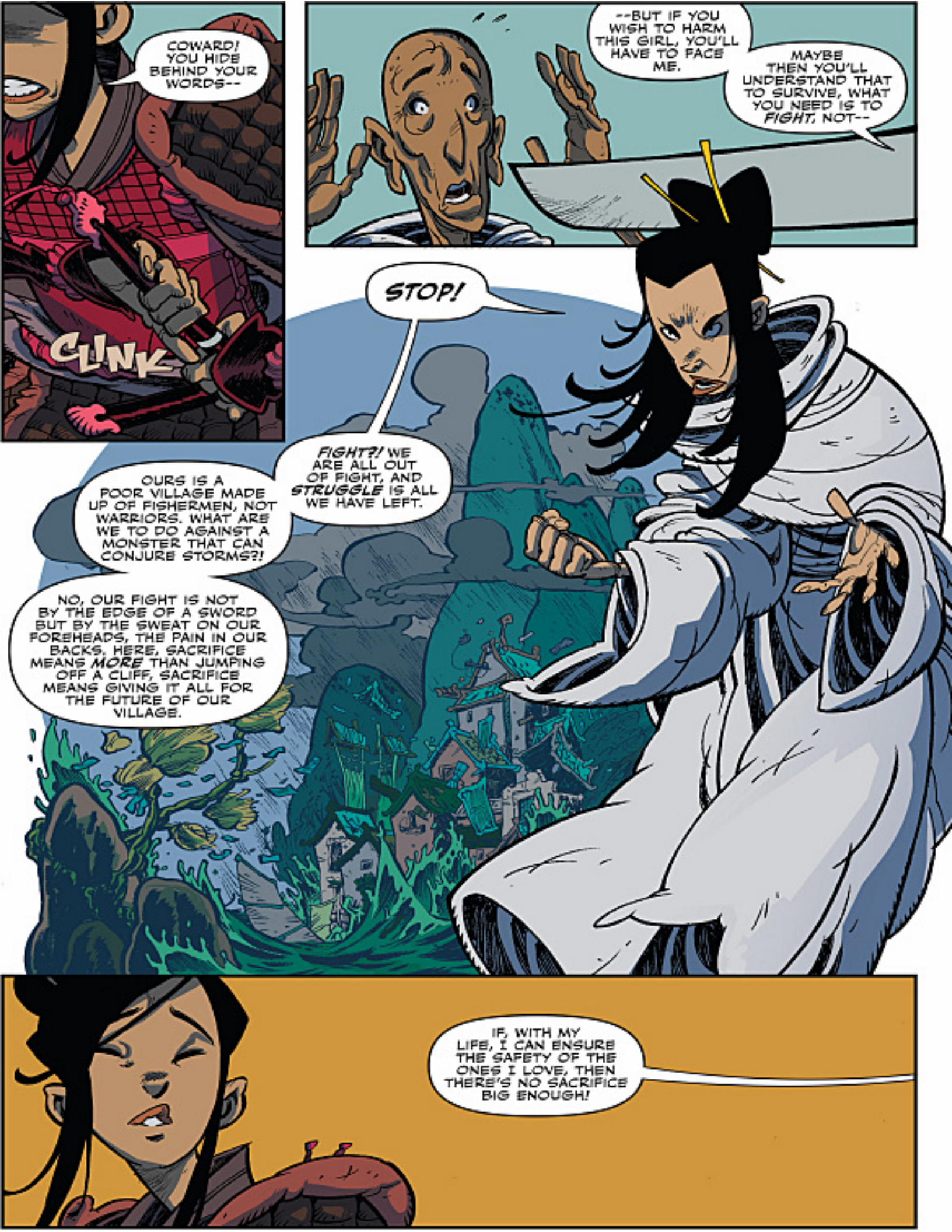
So the morning came that Tokoyo--woken by the sound of mysterious *prayers*--decided to follow two odd looking figures across the accursed forest.
Something didn't sit right with our warrior.


When the figures approached a most peculiar place by the edge of a cliff. Tokoyo knew her instincts were right.
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.

?!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

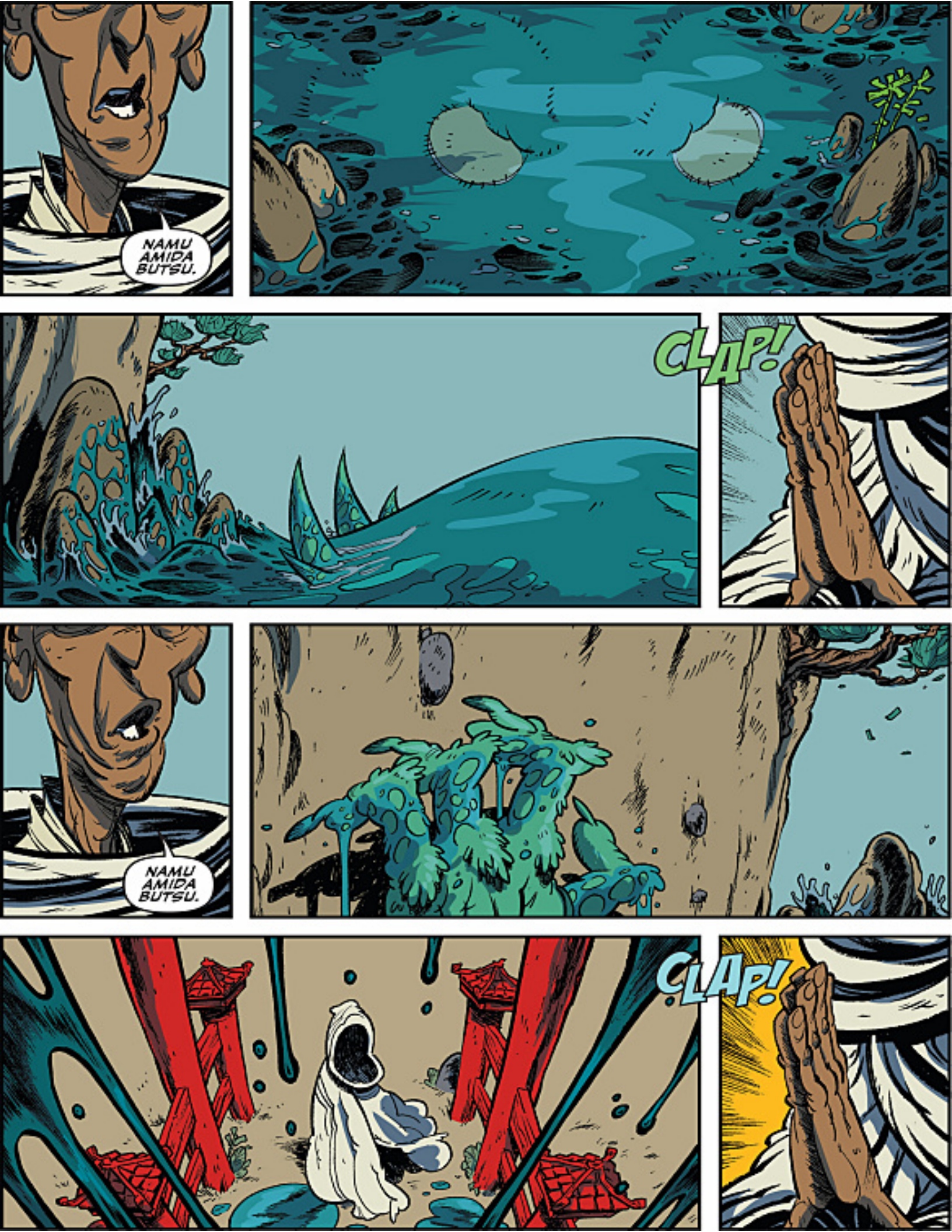
UGHOFF!
BETTER CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY, FOR THEY COULD EASILY BE YOUR LAST.
FEAR NOT, YOUNG SAMURAI, TO YOUR EYES I MUST BE NOTHING SHORT OF A MONSTER. I UNDERSTAND. IN MANY WAYS, IT IS EXACTLY WHAT I'VE BECOME.
BUT THE REASON FOR ALL THIS IS THE MONSTER THAT LIES THERE, DEEP WITHIN THOSE DARK WATERS.
WE COME FROM A NEARBY VILLAGE. THIS ISLAND IS CURSED BY THE CREATURE YOFUNE-NUSHI. EVERY YEAR THE STORY REPEATS ITSELF. I TAKE NO PLEASURE IN WHAT MUST BE DONE, BUT UNLESS A LIFE IS OFFERED IN RITUAL SACRIFICE, THE MONSTER'S WRATH WILL FALL UPON US ALL.
I DO NOT ASK YOU TO UNDERSTAND, BUT IF OUR VILLAGE IS TO SURVIVE, YOU NEED TO STEP ASIDE.

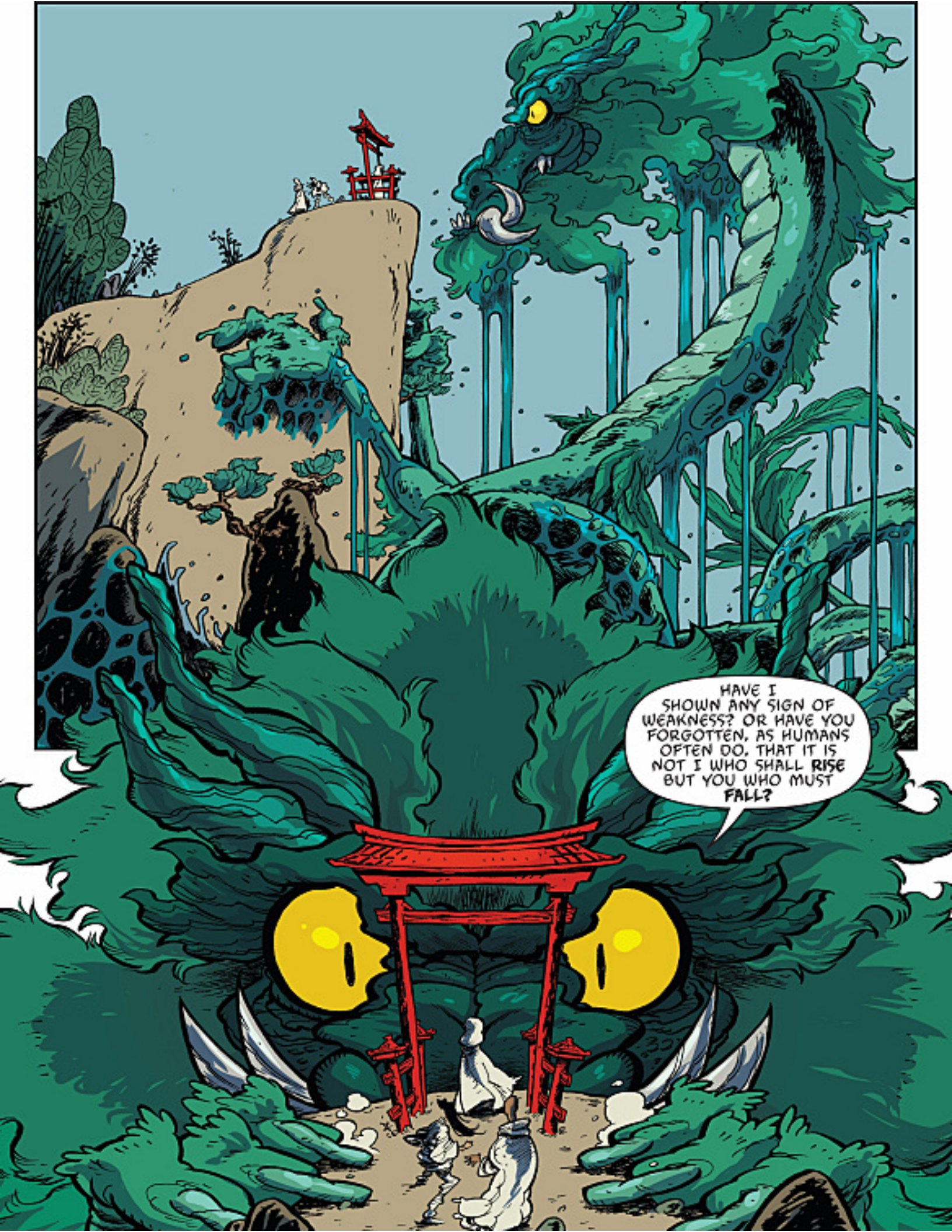

COWARD! YOU HIDE BEHIND YOUR WORDS--
CLINK
--BUT IF YOU WISH TO HARM THIS GIRL, YOU'LL HAVE TO FACE ME.
MAYBE THEN YOU'LL UNDERSTAND THAT TO SURVIVE, WHAT YOU NEED IS TO FIGHT, NOT--
STOP!
FIGHT?! WE ARE ALL OUT OF FIGHT, AND STRUGGLE IS ALL WE HAVE LEFT.
OURS IS A POOR VILLAGE MADE UP OF FISHERMEN, NOT WARRIORS. WHAT ARE WE TO DO AGAINST A MONSTER THAT CAN CONJURE STORMS?!
NO, OUR FIGHT IS NOT BY THE EDGE OF A SWORD BUT BY THE SWEAT ON OUR FOREHEADS, THE PAIN IN OUR BACKS. HERE, SACRIFICE MEANS MORE THAN JUMPING OFF A CLIFF, SACRIFICE MEANS GIVING IT ALL FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR VILLAGE.
IF, WITH MY LIFE, I CAN ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THE ONES I LOVE, THEN THERE'S NO SACRIFICE BIG ENOUGH!

WHAT AN AMAZING POWER WORDS CAN HOLD. AND IF YOU HAD BEEN THERE YOU COULD HAVE SEEN THESE WORDS STRIKING SHARPER THAN ANY SWORD.
WORDS?
Oh, yes! Particularly, words spoken from the heart. Unbeknownst to the girl, hers were words that Tokoyo had heard before.
IN THEM, TOKOYO RECOGNIZED THE FIRE THAT SHE HAD FELT SO MANY TIMES BEFORE.
The same fire that fueled her father to risk it all for those he held dear.

VERY WELL, LET MY BLADE BE YOUR BLADE, THEN. AND, PRIEST...

LET THE MONSTER KNOW WE ARE HERE.


NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.
CLAP!
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.
CLAP!

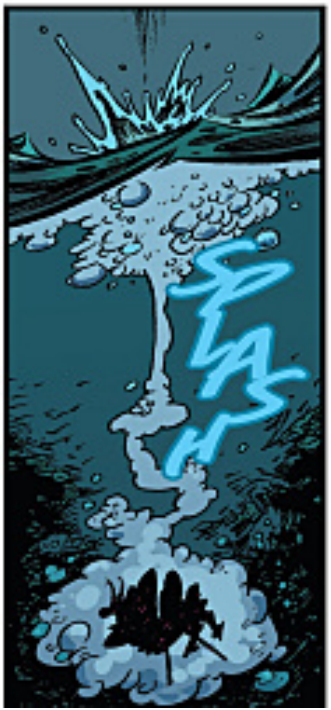

HAVE I SHOWN ANY SIGN OF WEAKNESS? OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN, AS HUMANS OFTEN DO, THAT IT IS NOT I WHO SHALL RISE BUT YOU WHO MUST FALL?

THERE WILL BE NO MORE RISING FOR YOU, FOUL BEAST. AND THE ONLY THING TO FALL WILL BE *MY BLADE* UPON YOUR THROAT!
FWASHH
HMM? THAT ARMOR...
HA! ARE YOU NOT ONE OF LORD HOJO'S SAMURAIS, YOUNG ONE? ARE YOU OBLIVIOUS TO WHAT YOUR ACTIONS CAN BRING UPON THIS LAND?
OR HAS THE OLD MAN FINALLY GONE MAD AND IGNORED OUR **PACT?**
PERHAPS I HAVE BEEN TOO SOFT, AFTER ALL. IN THAT CASE...
And with a roar louder than a thousand thunderclaps, the dragon covered the sky with the darkest clouds and a storm formed near the fishing village.

I DO NOT KNOW ABOUT DEALS WITH DEVILS...

...BUT I WILL NOT ALLOW FOR YOUR WICKEDNESS TO HURT THESE POOR SOULS ANY LONGER!

WH
PM

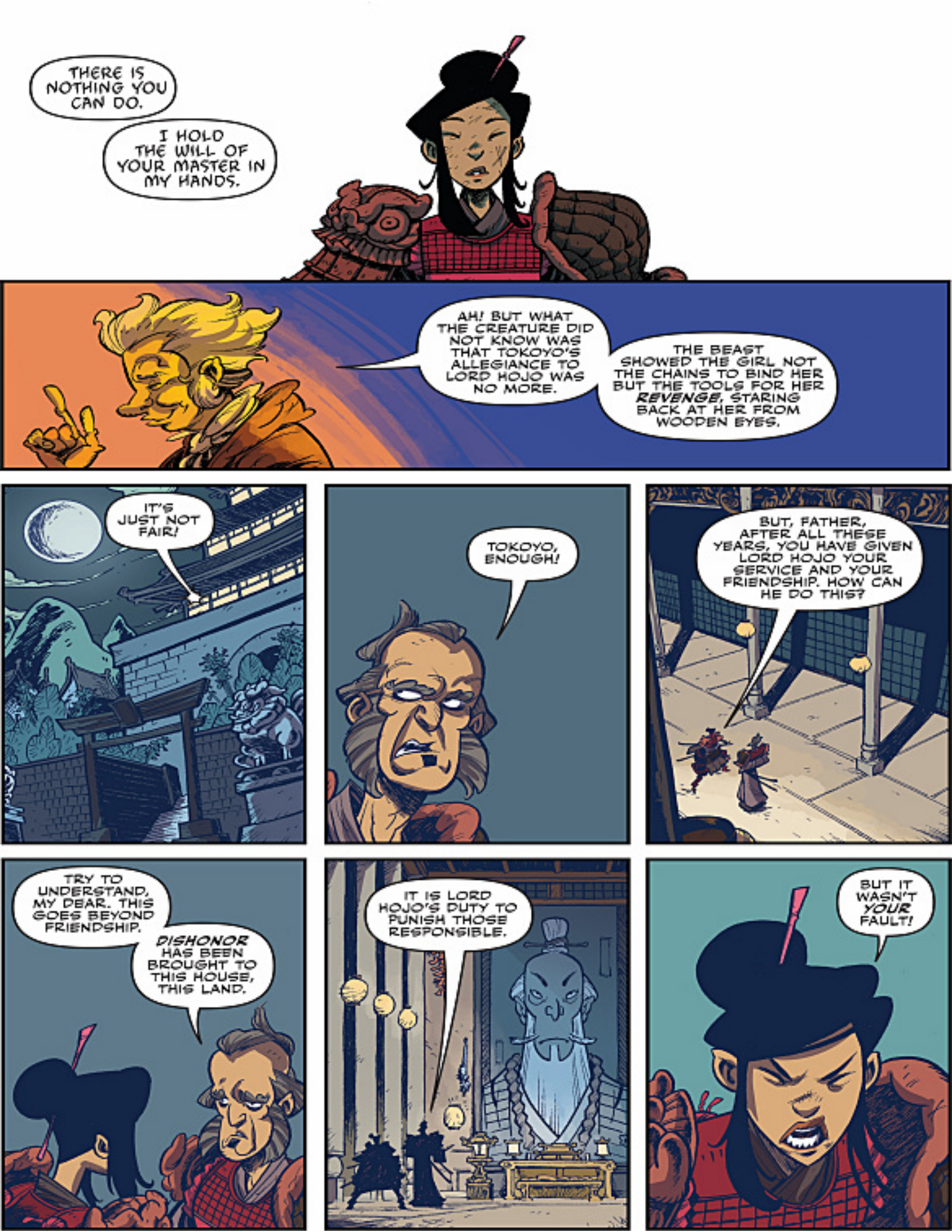

FLASH

ALLOW?! YOU DARE...!

THUMP

GASP!!!

AH, THERE YOU ARE. DO YOU SEE IT NOW? DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
YOUR HANDS ARE TIED, YOUNG ONE. JUST AS HOJO'S ARE.
HE KNOWS THE POWER THESE CARVINGS POSSESS.
FOR EVERY WOODEN HOUSE I DESTROY, ITS REFLECTION IN YOUR LAND WILL FOLLOW THE SAME FATE.
FOR WHATEVER LIMB I TWIST ON THIS STATUE, HE WILL FEEL THE PAIN AND AGONY AS IF IT WERE HIS OWN.
NO MATTER HOW STRONG A MAN'S CONVICTION IS--
--THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING HE WOULD SACRIFICE EVERYTHING FOR.

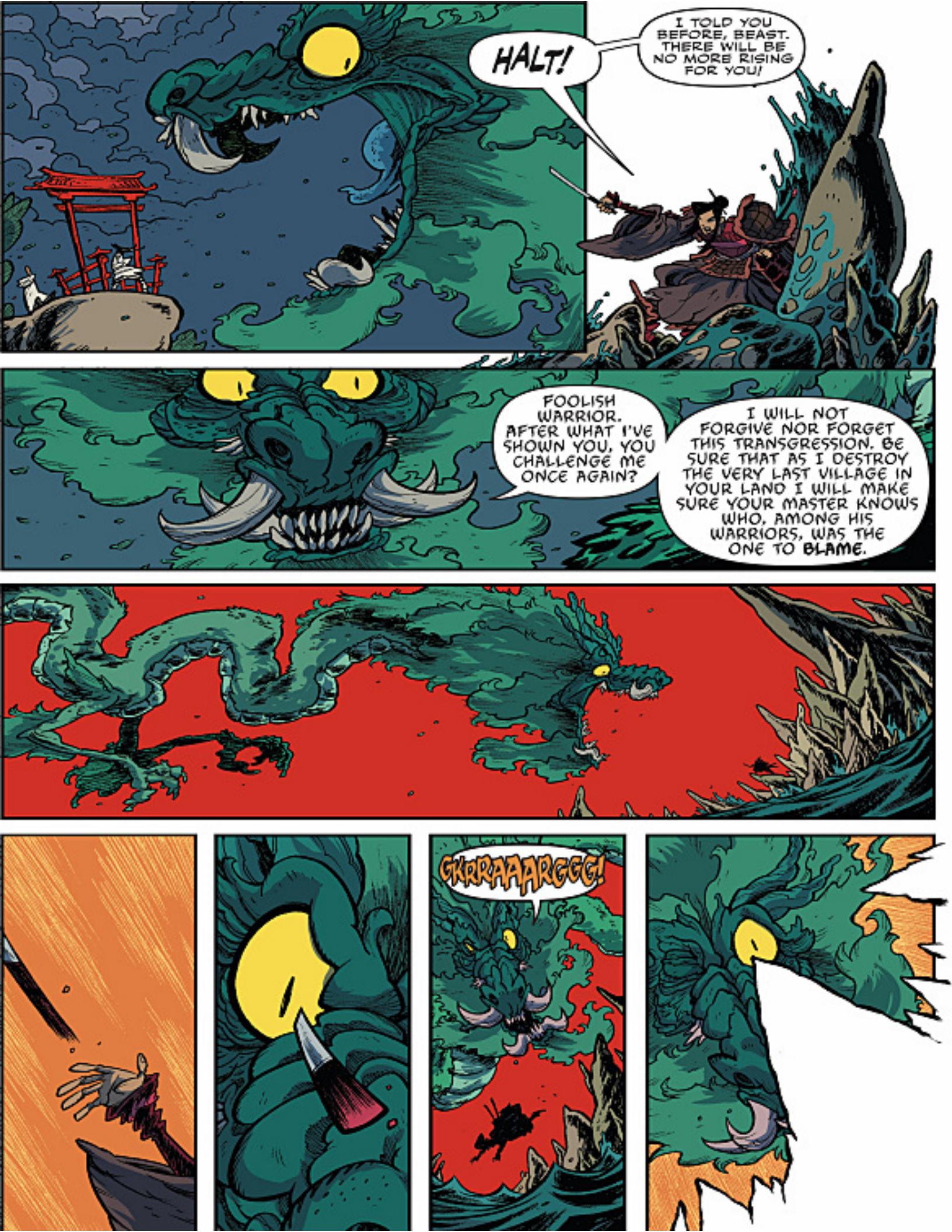

THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO.
I HOLD THE WILL OF YOUR MASTER IN MY HANDS.
AH! BUT WHAT THE CREATURE DID NOT KNOW WAS THAT TOKOYO'S ALLEGIANCE TO LORD HOJO WAS NO MORE.
THE BEAST SHOWED THE GIRL NOT THE CHAINS TO BIND HER BUT THE TOOLS FOR HER REVENGE, STARING BACK AT HER FROM WOODEN EYES.
IT'S JUST NOT FAIR!
TOKOYO, ENOUGH!
BUT, FATHER, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, YOU HAVE GIVEN LORD HOJO YOUR SERVICE AND YOUR FRIENDSHIP. HOW CAN HE DO THIS?
TRY TO UNDERSTAND, MY DEAR. THIS GOES BEYOND FRIENDSHIP.
DISHONOR HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO THIS HOUSE, THIS LAND.
IT IS LORD HOJO'S DUTY TO PUNISH THOSE RESPONSIBLE.
BUT IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT!

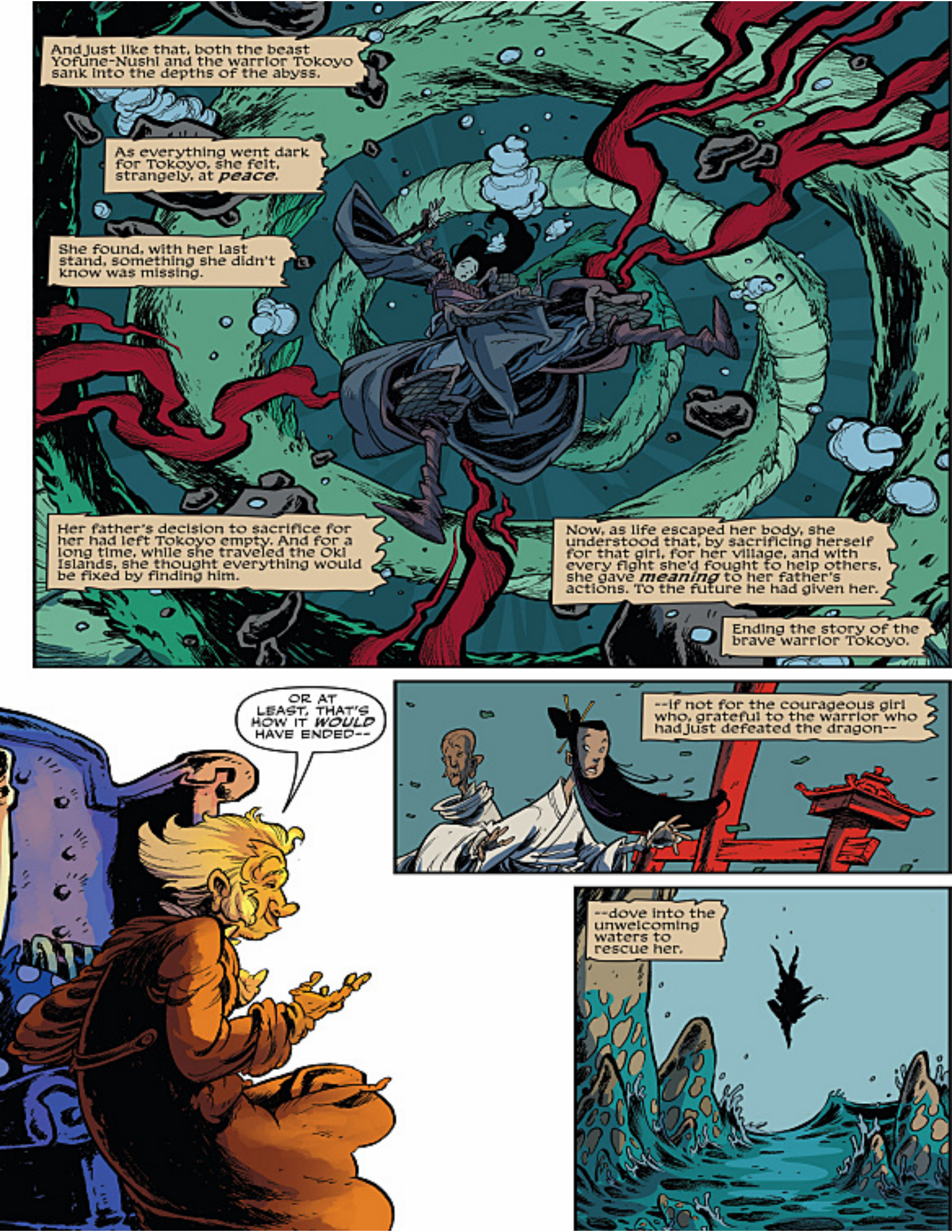
...
AND WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?
THERE IS NO MAN OR WOMAN, NO SOLDIER OR CHILD IN THIS LAND THAT I WOULDN'T GIVE MY LIFE FOR.
DO YOU EXPECT ME TO BE ANY DIFFERENT WHEN IT IS YOU, MY OWN BLOOD, WHO IS AT RISK?
REMEMBER, MY LOVE, NOT EVERY BATTLE IS FOUGHT WITH A SWORD. LET ME BE THE BLADE THAT PROTECTS YOU NOW.
FATHER, I SHOULD BE THE ONE...
TOKOYO, WHEN IT COMES TO THE ONES YOU LOVE--
--THERE'S NO SACRIFICE BIG ENOUGH.

SHE WAS THE ONE MEANT TO BE BANISHED?! AND, AFTER LETTING HER FATHER TAKE THE BLAME, WOULD SHE STRIKE HOJO'S STATUE AND TAKE REVENGE?
I'LL SAY IT AGAIN. WHAT A HEROINE SHE TURNED OUT TO BE.

What? Oh no, it was not Hojo's face carved on the wood.
It was his son's.

NAMU AMIDA BUTSU.
GRRR?
IT SEEMS THE REAL SACRIFICE IS FINALLY READY.
AND FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR MASTER, YOU BETTER BE HERE WHEN I RETURN, SAMURAI.
QUICK! IF WE'RE TO STOP THE STORM WE NEED TO CALM THE BEAST!
YOU DARE SUMMON ME AGAIN?
WE ONLY WISH TO SAVE OUR VILLAGE, AND IF SACRIFICE IS THE ONLY WAY THEN I OFFER MYSELF TO YOU, YOFUNE-NUSHI!
SPLRSH
YOU AND YOUR VILLAGE ARE BEYOND SAVING, GIRL--
RAAAWWW


HALT!
I TOLD YOU BEFORE, BEAST. THERE WILL BE NO MORE RISING FOR YOU!
FOOLISH WARRIOR. AFTER WHAT I'VE SHOWN YOU, YOU CHALLENGE ME ONCE AGAIN?
I WILL NOT FORGIVE NOR FORGET THIS TRANSGRESSION. BE SURE THAT AS I DESTROY THE VERY LAST VILLAGE IN YOUR LAND I WILL MAKE SURE YOUR MASTER KNOWS WHO, AMONG HIS WARRIORS, WAS THE ONE TO BLAME.
GKRRAAARGGG!


And just like that, both the beast Yofune-Nushi and the warrior Tokoyo sank into the depths of the abyss.
As everything went dark for Tokoyo, she felt, strangely, at *peace*.
She found, with her last stand, something she didn't know was missing.
Her father's decision to sacrifice for her had left Tokoyo empty. And for a long time, while she traveled the Oki Islands, she thought everything would be fixed by finding him.
Now, as life escaped her body, she understood that, by sacrificing herself for that girl, for her village, and with every fight she'd fought to help others, she gave *meaning* to her father's actions. To the future he had given her.
Ending the story of the brave warrior Tokoyo.
OR AT LEAST, THAT'S HOW IT *WOULD* HAVE ENDED--
--if not for the courageous girl who, grateful to the warrior who had just defeated the dragon--
--dove into the unwelcoming waters to rescue her.

It took three days and three nights for Tokoyo to recover.
When she finally woke up, Tokoyo was no longer in armor and her clothes were clean and smelled like spring ought to.
Her wounds were treated and the pain was almost gone.
Confused, Tokoyo walked across the strange room towards the door--
--just to find herself in a very *familiar* place.
WHERE WAS SHE?

Well, would you believe me if I told you she was back at Lord Hojo's palace?
See, when Tokoyo left in search for her banished father, she did so in a rush.

Hate can sometimes blind us to what's right in front of us.
It was never Lord Hojo's intention to send his friend, Oribe Shima, to such a horrible place as the Oki Islands. But, in order to protect Tokoyo, an exile had to be *staged*.

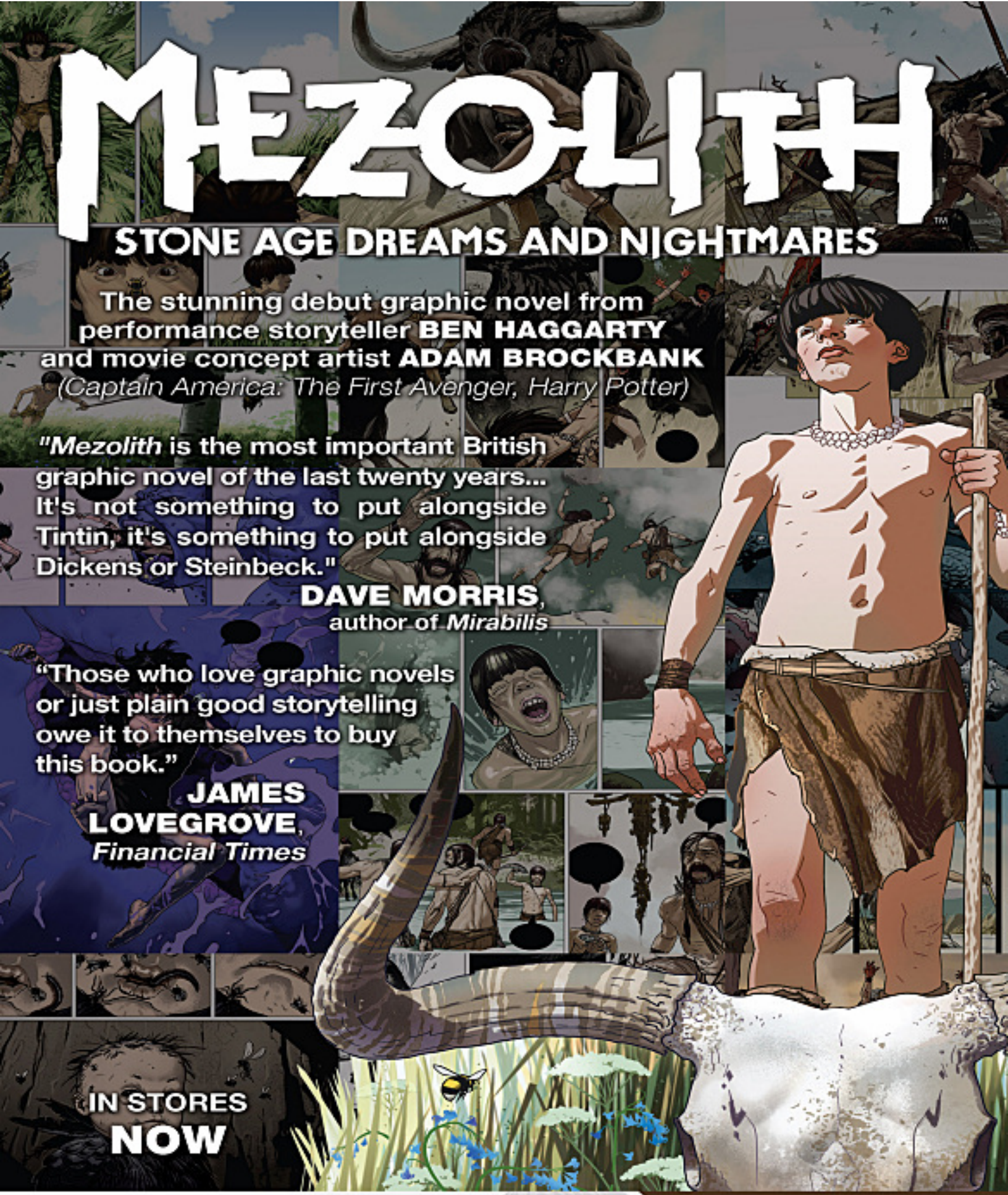
Instead, Hojo took Oribe to live inside the walls of his private garden, away from wandering eyes.

Once reunited, no words were spoken. But at that moment, Tokoyo realized--

--that it was not hate, but *shame* that had followed her to those Islands.

In the end? Free from the dragon Yofune-Nushi and the curse over his house, Lord Hojo entrusted his closest warriors with a *new* mission.
Tokoyo, along with her father, returned to the Oki Islands vanquishing all remaining darkness from it.
But that, I'm afraid, is a *different* story.

...
THERE'S ALWAYS TIME FOR *ANOTHER* STORY.
HAHAHA!
THE END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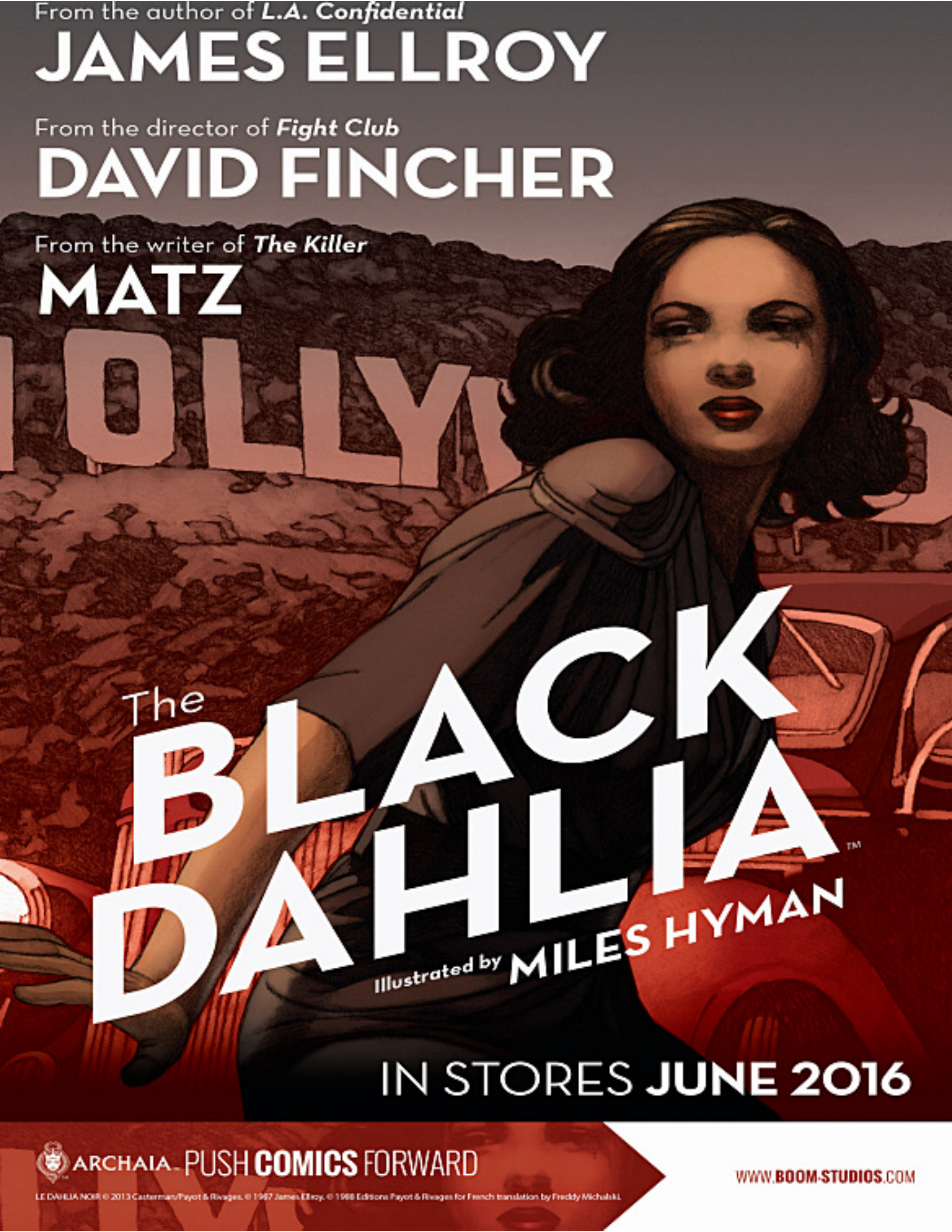
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From the writer of The Killer
MATZ
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Tale Four of Four: Dragons

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